HINTS

FOR SOME NEW

REGULATIONS

IN THE

SUGAR-TRADE:

WITH

REMARKS

ON THE

STATE OF COMMERCE

IN THE

FRENCH AND BRITISH WEST-INDIA ISLANDS.

BY AN IMPARTIAL MAN.

——————Si quid novisti rectius istis,
Candidus, imperti; si non, his utere mecum. HOR.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR H. D. SYMONDS, PATERNOSTER-ROW;
J. DEBRETT, PICCADILLY; and J. SEWELL, CORNHILL.

M.DCC.XCII.

HINTS, &c.

A GENERAL idea prevails, that ſome new regulations are about to be brought forward, in parliament, with the view of moderating the high price of ſugar: but what are the moſt adviſeable ſteps to be taken for that purpoſe, and how the public can be accommodated, without injury to the revenue or interference with the

intereſt of individuals, are queſtions by no means agreed upon; and on which the miniſter himſelf, if we may judge from his queries to the Weſt-India Planters and Merchants, ſeems to wiſh to poſſeſs himſelf of fuller information before he decides. The misfortune, in this as in all ſimilar caſes, is, that the parties more immediately concerned, who are the beſt, if not the only competent, judges, give their ſentiments with an eye to private views; withholding every circumſtance that they think would tend to their particular diſadvantage, however it might promote the public good, and urging, with every ſpecious reaſon they can deviſe, whatever will conduce to their own intereſt, how injurious ſoever to that of the community.

The writer of theſe remarks, before he obtrudes his opinions upon the public, thinks it incumbent on him to premiſe, that his preſent ſituation in life exempts him from the poſſibility of being biaſſed by perſonal conſiderations; and he may farther ſay, that his means of information are ſuch as perhaps ſcarce another individual in this kingdom poſſeſſes, who ſtands on the ſame impartial ground that he does. Having been many years in the ſugar-refining manufactory, many years in the Weſt-Indies, and being now neither in the one nor the other, he has, of courſe, had the fulleſt opportunity of making himſelf maſter of the various views, projects, and intereſts, of the contending parties; for ſuch, in this buſineſs, he muſt conſider the planter, the refiner,

and the public. In the courſe of theſe pages he is ſenſible that he ſhall give umbrage by expoſing truths it is for the advantage of individuals to keep concealed; but, in juſtice to that impartiality which he profeſſes, his firſt obſervation muſt be, that the preſent ſcale of duties and drawbacks operates yet againſt the revenue; and, till Mr. Pitt declined increaſing the drawback on refined ſugar in proportion to the laſt additional duty laid on raw ſugar, did operate much more ſo, as will appear from the following ſtatement of the produce of 1 cwt. of raw ſugar, taken from an average of ſeveral years refining.

	Qrs.	lbs.
Refined ſugar . .	0	2 $4\frac{5}{16}$
Ground ditto . .	0	0 $20\frac{3}{16}$
Molaſſes . . .	0	0 $27\frac{5}{16}$
Dirt	0	0 $4\frac{3}{16}$
	1	0 0

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The drawback, therefore, paid on each cwt. of raw ſugar, refined and exported, is as under:

	£.	s.	d.
Refined ſugar 2 qrs 4 lbs $\frac{5}{16}$ at 26 s.	0	14	0
Ground ditto 20 lbs $\frac{3}{16}$ at 15 s.	0	2	$6\frac{1}{2}$
	0	16	$6\frac{1}{2}$
Duty received on 1 cwt. of raw ſugar is	0	15	0
Loſs to the revenue on each cwt. refined and exported . .	0	1	$6\frac{1}{2}$

This requires immediate regulation; for, it is ſurely ſufficient that the drawback ſhould be equal to the duty. Government was originally impoſed upon in the repreſentation made by the refiners of the quantity of refined ſugar produced from raw, on which the drawback was calculated: they ſtated only what it gave in the firſt proceſs, without

without adding that the ſyrups are worked over again, in ſeveral gradations, and yield ſomething in each, bringing the quantity, on the whole, to the calculation before made.

This is only redreſſing an abuſe of the preſent ſyſtem; the great object is to point out ſome alteration in it that may relieve the public without injury to individuals. A few remarks, on the different ſtate of commerce in the French and Britiſh Weſt-India iſlands, are neceſſary as an introduction to the plan propoſed.

In the Britiſh iſlands the produce is, for the moſt part, regularly conſigned, by the planter, to the merchant in the mother-country, who ſends him out the ſupplies neceſſary

neceſſary for his eſtate, and too generally appropriates the remainder of his crop to the payment of the intereſt (or, perhaps, in a good year, to the liquidation of part of the principal) of the debt due to himſelf, the conſignment of the ſugars to the lender being always a condition attached to the loan: and theſe loans, from the precarioufneſs of the cultivation, the various caſualties property in thoſe climates is ſubject to, and, in ſome inſtances, the want of economy in the planter, being very general, form a kind of chain that links the coloniſt to the mother-country, and binds every part of his property to contribute to the increaſe of her manufactures and navigation.

In the French iſlands the caſe is totally different; which, independent of other cauſes,

ſes, may principally be aſcribed to the nature of their laws; by which not only the eſtate, but the negroes, cattle, and every part of the planter's property neceſſary for cultivation, are protected againſt all claims for debt. The only recourſe allowed the creditor is to take the produce when made, which it is no difficult matter to ſecrete from his purſuit. In all countries, credit is given in proportion to the facility with which debts can be recovered; and the conſequence of this ſyſtem is, that hardly an inſtance exiſts of a merchant in France making advances for any planter in the Weſt-Indies: they go on perfectly independent of, and unconnected with, them.

It may be aſked here, how the French planters have been able to acquire this general

neral independence, having had no aſſiſtance from the mother-country, while ours, even with that advantage, are ſtill ſo deeply involved? This may be attributed to two cauſes; one, that, from that very want of credit, the French planter was bound down to the ſtricteſt economy, and obliged to make the raiſing every article, neceſſary for his own ſubſiſtence and that of his ſlaves, the firſt object of his care; thus his progreſs in cultivation, though ſlow, was ſure. While the Engliſh planter, purchaſing all his proviſions and bending all his labour to raiſing produce, on the increaſed quantity of which he depended for an indemnification of his expences, was frequently diſappointed. The other cauſe is the very cheap rate at which planters in the French iſlands procure lumber and proviſions, from their

ports

ports being open to the Americans; the retail prices in the French and Engliſh iſlands being generally about as follow:

Engliſh prices.		French prices.
24 Dollars,	Lumber, per m.	10 Dollars.
5	Salt fiſh, per cwt.	2½
5	Rice,	3
12	Beef, per barrel,	8
5	Indian meal, ditto,	3
1	Corn, per buſhel,	$0\frac{6}{11}$

Having digreſſed a little to clear up this point, the ſtatement of the French Weſt-India commerce is now to be returned to. The ſhips from France are loaded out on account of the owners; a ſupercargo goes in them; on his arrival in the Weſt-Indies he takes a ſtore, lands and ſells the cargo, purchaſes produce with the proceeds, loads his

his veſſel with it, and returns home. The planter, reſiding on his eſtate, has no concern with him; he employs his commiſſionaire, or town-agent, who ſends him the articles he has occaſion for, and ſells his produce for him to ſome of theſe ſupercargoes, or ſhips it clandeſtinely off the iſland to be ſold at other markets.

Other powers, who have poſſeſſions in the Weſt Indies, (particularly the Dutch,) have, with the ſoundeſt policy, long derived material advantage to themſelves, from framing their commercial laws with a view to the relative ſituation of their neighbours: on the ſame principle the writer of theſe hints would recommend, that the ports in the Britiſh Weſt-India iſlands ſhould be opened for the free admiſſion

admiſſion of foreign ſugars, and other produce, in the ſame manner as they now are for cotton. Before he enters upon the advantages that would reſult from this meaſure, he ſtops to anticipate the objection that he foreſees will be made againſt it. The Britiſh planter, jealous of the monopoly of the Britiſh market, for which he pays a valuable conſideration in being bound to ſend his ſugars to no other, will be ſtartled at the idea; but, on mature conſideration, it will not appear repugnant even to his intereſt, but fraught with benefit to that of the public. A great proportion of the French and other foreign cotton is brought into the Britiſh iſlands and ſhipped home from them; yet is it found that the Britiſh market for cotton is injured by that circumſtance? On the contrary, is it not

confeſſedly

confeſſedly the beſt market in Europe for that article, and is it not bought up in every part of the world to be ſent thither? Not more injurious would the ſame liberty be if extended to ſugar. It is granted, that, when charters were firſt given to encourage the ſettlement of the Britiſh iſlands, and during the infancy of their eſtabliſhment, it was an expedient and neceſſary encouragement to ſecure to them the excluſive ſupply of the Britiſh market, by impoſing ſuch duties on foreign ſugars as ſhould amount to a prohibition. But, now that their produce is more than adequate to the conſumption of the mother-country, ſo that one third part of it muſt be re-exported, and the price it will fetch in foreign markets muſt neceſſarily regulate the price of what is ſold here, it is evident that this reſtriction

can no longer be of uſe to them: that not Great Britain alone, but Europe, is the market for ſugars the Britiſh planter has to look up to; and that the demand from abroad muſt increaſe in proportion to the increaſed quantity, that, diverted from their markets, finds its way to ours, ſo as to keep the univerſal price at one common level. Should, for inſtance, a great and ſudden influx lower our market for a moment, the foreign purchaſer catches at the advantage, and ſends it away, till the diminution of the quantity left raiſes its value with us again. The exportation-trade is the ſecurity for the planter's intereſt, and the propoſal here recommended can never injure him while government continues that on its preſent footing.

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The benefits, that would reſult from the plan to our manufacturing and commercial intereſts, the public, and the revenue, are next to be conſidered. An extenſive contraband trade is carried on between the French and Engliſh Weſt-India iſlands, the balance of which is greatly in favour of the latter. The articles we take from them are trifling; and, except claret, hardly worth mentioning. They purchaſe from us negroes, plantation-ſtores, ſuch as ſheet-lead, mill-work, ſtills and worms, iron boilers, iron pots, wrought iron and hardware of all ſorts, building and temper lime, paints and oil, manufactured dry goods of all deſcriptions, porter, hams, &c. &c. In return for theſe they bring ſpecie and cotton. Were ſugars admitted to a free

entry, it would facilitate their payments, and thereby induce them to extend their purchaſes. It is computed that 15000 hogſheads of ſugar are ſent annually, from Guadaloupe alone, to St. Euſtatius, where the Dutch admit produce of all kinds, and their chief returns are taken in goods, of which the Dutch ſhips bring out immenſe cargoes, depending on this trade for the diſpoſal of them, and procuring them their lading home. Checks, linens, and Oſnaburgs, are the principal articles: we can ſupply theſe cheaper than the Dutch, but the trade is forced into that channel by our prohibiting the receipt of their produce in return. The extenſion of our manufactures, if this meaſure be adopted, muſt be conſiderable, when it is obſerved that this intercourſe would extend throughout all the

the French iſlands, which are ſo intermingled with ours, that they are all conveniently ſituated for carrying it on; and that the colonies of other powers would alſo avail themſelves of it, particularly Demarary, Eſſequibo, and Berbice, in which great numbers of Britiſh planters have lately made purchaſes, and Trinidad, where the cultivation of ſugar is juſt eſtabliſhed.

The policy of encouraging the importation of raw materials has been ſufficiently evinced in the article of cotton. Had foreign cotton been under the ſame prohibition as foreign ſugar now is, could that manufactory ever have attained its preſent flouriſhing height? Put foreign ſugar on the ſame footing, and the ſame cauſe will produce the ſame effect: the refining manu-

factory, inſtead of being dwindled almoſt to nothing, and in the hands of but a few individuals, will become extenſive and important; foreigners will be obliged to take a larger ſupply from our market, and it is for their advantage and convenience rather to purchaſe it refined than raw. For the farther encouragement of this manufactory, it would be juſt to adopt the French ſyſtem of laying higher duties on clayed than on raw ſugar; this would tend, at the ſame time, to the increaſe of our carrying trade, as ſugar clayed in the Weſt-Indies is diminiſhed in quantity one-third by the operation.

Opening the Weſt-India ports, for the admiſſion of foreign ſugars, would alſo provide employment for an additional num-

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ber of ſhipping to bring it home, which would not only be increaſing our own navigation, but decreaſing that of foreign powers, who now carry it in their bottoms, in the ſame proportion. Our mercantile intereſts would be benefited by this influx of new buſineſs paſſing through their hands. The public would have more produce at market, which could not be repurchaſed by foreigners without additional charges on it to them, that would center as profits among us; and every hogſhead of raw ſugar, exported, will, by drainage, ſamples, &c. loſe in weight 30 or 40 lbs. while here, which the revenue will have received duty for more than it pays drawback upon.

Some other ſchemes reſpecting the ſugar-trade are ſuppoſed to be in agitation, a

few remarks upon them may not be ill-timed. To reduce the price of ſugar, by taking off the drawback, is a certain and eaſy mode; but how far it may be either politic or juſt ſhould be very ſeriouſly conſidered, before it is adopted. Every ſhilling, ſo ſaved to the public, would be at the coſt of the coloniſts. If Great Britain has the excluſive ſupply of the iſlands with her manufactures, carries on their navigation in her bottoms alone, takes the preference of all their produce by bringing it firſt to her own markets, and impoſing what duty ſhe pleaſes on the quantity ſold there, ſhe has all that ſhe ought to claim; and, to deny them the privilege of ſending away what ſhe refuſes to purchaſe, would be oppreſſive in her, and ruinous to them. Regulating the drawback according

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to the price of the commodity would not only be attended with difficulties in the execution, but is liable to this obvious objection. The general cauſe of a riſe is the failure of the crop; and, unleſs the diminution of quantity is compenſated for by an advance of price, which this is intended to prevent, (though the natural remedy,) the planter muſt be undone. If care is taken to guard the intereſt of the public on one hand, let that of the planter be equally ſecured on the other, and a fair medium price be fixed on between them. Then let the bounty be reduced when above, and the duty taken off when below, it, in equal proportions, ſo as to keep the balance even. But this would ſubject the revenue to too great fluctuations, or, if the preſent diſpoſition for planting canes continues, might ſoon leave none at all.

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The expediency of encouraging new ſettlements for the cultivation of ſugar, in oppoſition to the old ones, and admitting their produce to the Britiſh market at reduced duties, needs no ſpirit of prophecy to decide upon. The ſole temptation, adventurers can have to embark in ſuch undertakings, is the preſent high price of the commodity; when that fails, (which, proceeding from temporary cauſes, it ſoon muſt,) they will be diſappointed in their expectations, and the competition will end in the injury of both the one and the other. In the Eaſt Indies, labour and proviſions are both cheap, and their ſupplies moſtly within themſelves; in the Weſt, both are dear, and every thing is drawn from this country at an immenſe expence to them, and advantage to us; they,

they, therefore, will probably ſink firſt in the rivalry, and, if the others riſe at all, they muſt riſe on their ruins. The quantity of ſugar already made in good crops is ſufficient to ſupply the demand, and to keep it at a moderate price; if more is raiſed, the price muſt fall, till the ruin of the cultivators diminiſhes the quantity, and raiſes it to its level again. All inconveniences, like the one now complained of, ſoon work their own remedy. In 1786, another Weſt-India commodity [cotton] had a rapid riſe. No interference was uſed on the part of government; yet, in leſs than two years, the cultivation of that article became ſo general, and ſuch quantities were poured into the market, that it fell lower than ever, and ſo continued till within theſe few months paſt. It then became no lon-

ger an object to bring from the Eaſt Indies; and, of the planters in the Weſt, many, who had ſufficient funds, and whoſe lands were adapted to the purpoſe, put them into canes, and many who were not ſo circumſtanced were ruined by the low price it remained at, and obliged to abandon the cultivation. Theſe circumſtances have again occaſioned a ſcarcity, and raiſed the price, which will be again checked in the ſame way. Such alſo will be the caſe with ſugar: it is already brought us from the Eaſt Indies, and new ſettlements are forming for the cultivation of it on the coaſt of Africa; that the Weſt-India planter will ſoon, as the cotton-planter has done, pay dearly for the high price he has lately obtained. If, in addition to the rivalry they are about to experience, the ſtrong arm of power is lifted

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up againſt them, and any new regulations are introduced to their diſadvantage, they muſt ſink under its weight. In a political point of view, the Weſt-India colonies have certainly pretenſions to favour, that no other of our foreign poſſeſſions can urge; their manufactures interfere with none of thoſe of the mother-country, but, on the contrary, give them new employment, and open new channels for their circulation; they increaſe her navigation and commerce in an eminent degree, by not only returning their produce to, but drawing their ſupplies from, her; and whatever wealth is accumulated there centers in her again. Many, who riſk their lives and fortunes in thoſe climates, loſe them both: and, where enterprize and induſtry are crowned with ſucceſs, it is hard

hard that they ſhould be grudged their recompence by thoſe who ſit ſafely and quietly at home. What would a commercial country like this ſoon be, without men of ſuch character? Yet it is the temper of the times to diſcourage and look with an evil eye on the Weſt Indians. From other conſiderations they are become unpopular, and even obnoxious to a great part of the community, who ſeem diſpoſed to puſh forward any meaſures that will operate to their detriment, without remembering, that, as Engliſhmen ſitting to decide upon the properties of their fellow-ſubjects, they are bound to *well and truly try according to the evidence before them*, and not ſuffer themſelves to be biaſſed in this cauſe by prejudices foreign to the queſtion. The preſent high price of ſugar

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has been chiefly owing to the failure of ſeveral ſucceſſive crops in the windward-iſlands; to puniſh the planter, therefore, for a circumſtance, of which he already feels the weight far more ſeverely than any other individual, would be adding cruelty to misfortune. The proſpects for the preſent crop are good in all the iſlands, and the price muſt fall on its arrival. To adopt permanent regulations, merely for the ſake of remedying a temporary evil, (at leaſt without well weighing their conſequences,) would be impolitic indeed. The writer of theſe remarks has thrown together his ideas on the ſubject; and truſts that what he has propoſed will, in ſome degree, contribute to the end in view, without injury to the intereſts of any of the parties concerned.

THE END.

has been chiefly owing to the failure of several successive crops in the windward-islands; to [illegible] therefore, for [illegible] already [illegible] more severely than any other individual, would be adding cruelty to misfortune. The prospects for the present crop are good in [illegible] islands, and the price must fall [illegible]. To adopt permanent regulations, merely for the sake of [illegible] a temporary evil, (as least without well weighing their consequences,) would be impolitic indeed. The writer of these remarks has thrown together his ideas on the subject; and trusts that what he has proposed will, in some degree, contribute to the end in view, without injury to the interests of any of the parties concerned.

THE END.